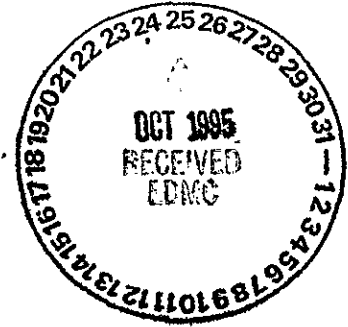




0042314

Department of Energy
Richland Operations Office
P.O. Box 550
Richland, Washington 99352

October 3, 1995



Dear Interested Party:

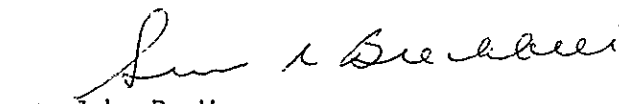
On October 10, 1995, the U.S. Department of Energy, Richland Operations Office (RL) will publish the enclosed notice in the Federal Register. The purpose of this notice is to reopen the comment period for twenty-one days closing October 30, 1995, in order to solicit comments on the Department's intention to consider a Preferred Alternative which does not include construction of up to six new tanks in the Safe Interim Storage (SIS) of Hanford Tank Wastes Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). RL will instead propose a Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS to construct a Replacement Cross-Site Transfer System (RCSTS) to replace the Existing non-compliant Cross-Site Transfer System (ECSTS) to enable transfer of waste to existing available tanks in the 200 East Area. 37654

During the public comment period on the Draft SIS EIS, several commenters objected to construction of the new tanks and questioned the wisdom of new construction of tanks when alternatives such as the continued use of mixer pumps appeared to remedy the potentially flammable Hydrogen gas generation problem which initiated the action. Since that time, RL has obtained an independent assessment by Pacific Northwest Laboratories (PNL 10105, September 1994) supporting the effectiveness of the mixer pumps and recommending their continued use.

In the Draft SIS EIS, RL proposed the RCSTS as a necessary related project to support waste transfer to the proposed new tanks. Given the change in the need for new tanks, RL has reassessed its ongoing need for safe tank waste management and believes that there is a continued need for the RCSTS to facilitate transfer of liquid tank wastes from the 200 West to existing double shelled tanks in the 200 East Area of the Hanford Site. Details of the need are described more completely in the attached notice.

RL appreciates your comments and continued participation in this Program.

Sincerely,


John D. Wagoner
Manager

Enclosure

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

SAFE INTERIM STORAGE OF HANFORD TANK
WASTES ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

AGENCY: Department of Energy

ACTION: Notice of Limited Reopening of Public Comment Period

SUMMARY: The Department of Energy (DOE) is evaluating alternatives for managing safety issues related to high level radioactive waste tanks at the Hanford Site located near Richland, Washington. On August 5, 1994, the DOE announced the availability of the SIS Draft EIS (59 FR 40018, August 5, 1994). Public hearings to receive comments were conducted and public comments were received from August 1994 through July 1995. The intent of this notice is to notify the public of changes in the U.S. Department of Energy's Safe Interim Storage (SIS) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Preferred Alternative and to reopen the comment period for 21 days in order to solicit comments on the proposed changes. DOE is proposing to eliminate construction of up to 6 new high level radioactive waste tanks as part of the Preferred Alternative and to proceed with a Preferred Alternative which continues to support construction of the Replacement Cross Site Transfer System to facilitate transfers of waste from the 200 West Area to existing tanks in the 200 East Area.

DATES: Comments on construction of the Replacement Cross Site Transfer System, including additional comments on the analysis of potential impacts described in the Draft SIS EIS are invited from the public for a period of 21 days. Comments received during this period and in response to the Final EIS will be responded to in the SIS EIS Record of Decision.

CONTACT: General questions concerning the Hanford Tank Waste Remediation Program and or comments on this notice can be stated and recorded over the telephone during the comment period by calling the toll free telephone number at 1-800-321-2008 or (509) 372-2731, by Facsimile (509) 372-1215, or by Electronic-Mail at InterNet address "Carolyn_C_Haass@RL.gov", or by writing to:

Ms. Carolyn H. Haass
U.S. Department of Energy
P.O. Box 550, MSIN S7-51
Richland, WA. 99352

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For general information on the DOE NEPA process, please contact:

Ms. Carol M. Borgstrom, Director
Office of NEPA Policy and Assistance, EH-42
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20585
(202) 586-4600 or 1-800-472-2756

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

On January 28, 1994, in a Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced its intent to prepare an interim action Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to resolve safety issues associated with Watchlist tanks, the Safe Interim Storage (SIS) EIS, and the Tank Waste Remediation System (TWRS) EIS (59 FR 4052). Specifically, the SIS EIS considered alternatives for the resolution of near-term safety concerns related to Hydrogen gas generation in Watchlist tanks.

The Proposed action is subject to National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) (10 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500) and the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) (RCW 43.21C). DOE and Ecology signed a Memorandum of Understanding on February 15, 1994 to jointly prepare both EISs (MOU 1994). The co-preparation of the EIS streamlines the environmental review process while ensuring compliance with applicable Federal and State laws, regulations and policies.

The Draft SIS EIS, issued for public comment on July 22, 1994, evaluated a proposed action to construct up to six new tanks and associated infrastructure including a waste retrieval system (the Initial Tank Retrieval System), and a replacement waste transfer system (the Replacement Cross Site Transfer System) which would be required if dilution at a ratio of 3:1 was used to remedy the gas problem. The SIS EIS also evaluated a No Action Alternative which allowed continued operation of a mixer pump designed to regulate the release of the gas so that levels would not be flammable.

Comments on the proposed action were received from August 1994 through July 1995. Since issuance of the Draft SIS EIS, DOE obtained an independent assessment by Pacific Northwest Laboratories (PNL, 10105, September 1994) of the effectiveness of the mixer pump in 101-SY. The PNL report supported continued use of the mixer pump to stir the tanks waste, thus releasing Hydrogen gases at a more predictable and regular rate. This action has been determined to adequately mitigate the safety question regarding whether episodic releases or "burps" could be ignited and pose a risk for uncontrolled release of fission products. Accordingly, DOE now believes that through continued use of mixer pump, waste exhibiting gas release activity may continue to be safely stored in existing tanks.

and may not need to be removed and diluted prior to final treatment for disposal, therefore DOE may not have a need to build additional tanks in the near term.

As a result of the success of these actions taken and in response to comments from the public regarding a pronounced preference to proceed with the clean up and to not build additional high level waste (HLW) storage tanks, the DOE has decided to propose a Preferred Alternative in the Final SIS EIS which does not include construction of new HLW storage tanks in the near term.

However, DOE still has an on-going need to continue safe management of wastes in the Hanford tanks in the interim or until such time as the TWRS EIS evaluates final waste treatment and disposal options. DOE has decided that the SIS EIS is an appropriate means for providing a NEPA review of the remaining Watchlist tank safety related requirements in the interim. The Final SIS EIS will therefore evaluate a Preferred Alternative which includes construction of a Replacement Cross Site Transfer System (RCSTS) to replace the existing Cross Site Transfer System (ECSTS), because continued safe management of tank waste in the near term will require the assured capability for waste to be safely and reliably transferred between tank farm areas. The Preferred Alternative, would provide the means needed to move wastes from the 200 West area to the existing double-shell tanks (DSTs) located in 200 East area.

The Final SIS EIS will analyze the following alternatives to support continued safe storage and tank farm waste management activities: construction of a replacement cross-site transfer system (RCSTS); alternative waste transport by rail; alternative waste transport by truck transport; and construction of two new tanks in either the 200 West or 200 East areas.

NEED FOR ACTION

Waste management of tank farms in the near term will require that DOE transfer waste in a reliable and compliant manner from the West side of the 200 area to the East side in order to safely manage waste and to expedite clean up of the Hanford Site. Part of that requirement is to remove salt well liquids (SWL) from older single-shell tanks (SSTs) and transfer to newer double-shell tanks (DSTs) to reduce the likelihood of liquid waste escaping from the corroded tanks into the environment. In the event of certain types of unsafe waste conditions, such as gas generation or tank leaks, DOE also may need to remove waste from one tank and place it in another tank. No additional waste is permitted to be added to SSTs, and most of the newer DSTs are located on the East side of the 200 area, necessitating waste transfers from West to East Areas. Additional requirements for safe management of tank wastes during the interim period prior to the TWRS EIS ROD could include retrieval of 102-SY solids, such that tank 102-SY could stage both organic and inorganic SWL for transfer.

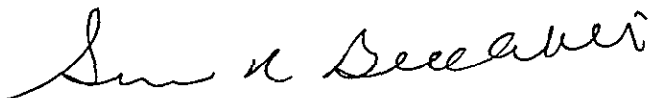
The existing cross-site transfer system (ECSTS) is only partially usable, given that 4 of the 6 lines are either plugged or failed, and the other 2 lines may or may not prove usable after pressure testing. Recently a single line was tested and approximately 435,000 gallons of supernatant was transferred from Tank 102-SY in the 200 West Area, to a DST in the 200 East Area. However, the continuing viability of these lines is uncertain and cannot be relied

upon. In addition, the ECSTS was built prior to environmental protection requirements implemented by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), 40 CFR 264.193, which requires double containment and leak detection capabilities for all hazardous waste tanks and ancillary equipment (e.g., piping). The ECSTS lines are also not compliant with the Washington State Dangerous Waste Regulations, WAC 173-303-640, which is the State requirement for double containment and leak detection capability. By mutual agreement between DOE and Ecology, a limited amount of Salt Well Liquid may be transferred, until such time as DOE implements a replacement waste transfer system. At present, waste containing solids may not be transferred via the ECSTS due to the likelihood of plugging the old lines.

DOE believes that continued safe management of wastes is supported in this Interim Action EIS, while the final treatment and disposal options are being evaluated in the TWRS EIS. The RCSTS will not prejudice consideration of any of the alternatives being evaluated in the TWRS EIS, as the ability to transfer liquids between tanks and areas is necessary even under a No Action alternative.

The public is invited to comment on the change in the Preferred Alternative pursuant to this notice for a period of 21 days. Comments received during this period and in response to the Final EIS will be responded to in the Record of Decision.

Issued in Richland, Washington this 5 day of October, 1995, for the United States Department of Energy.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan Brechbill".

Susan Brechbill, Acting Manager
U.S. Department of Energy
Richland Operations Office